

GEOMETRY IN THE GRAIN

CROP CIRCLES OF 2004

Dramatic and complex new designs emerged in the English fields during the 2004 crop circle summer, defying the plunkers and debunkers and standing out for their beauty and strangeness.

by Andy Thomas © 2004

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After an abruptly premature end to last year's crop circle season in early August, there was a faltering start to the 2004 crop formations—at least in England, the traditional heartland of the mystery. By the middle of June there were far fewer numbers than expected for that time of year, and there was a general feeling amongst the research community that the phenomenon, whatever its source or intent—still absolutely unknown—was on a go-slow.

Statistics from other countries also seemed depressed compared with showings in recent years. Germany, which in 2003 almost rivalled the UK in terms of circle numbers, only produced around 20 formations in 2004, while countries such as the USA, Canada, the Netherlands and Italy, which had all been blossoming areas in recent years, only managed about 10 formations each throughout the whole year.

As far as the UK was concerned, a revival in impetus finally arrived in mid-June with the appearance of several intriguing and complex designs to match many of those seen in previous years. By the end of August, around 60 formations had been recorded.

The first significantly dramatic design of the season came in the form of a large double spiral at Fort Nelson, Portchester, Hampshire, on 11 June (figure 1). The two thin, perfect spirals reminded some of the infamous "ET and disc" formation of 2002, which included a binary message notched into a similar spiral. The decoded message was a warning, beginning with: "Beware the bearers of false gifts and their broken promises..." The resemblance between this and the two new spirals suggested to some that we were being invited to carve our own binary reply into them! In the event, this didn't happen; though the thought did spark some communication experiments later in the season—led by Jack Sullivan and Martin Noakes, who flashed binary messages into the sky with some interesting results (see article at <http://www.swirlednews.com>).

The traditional centre of the phenomenon, Alton Barnes in Wiltshire, then produced its latest masterpiece on 20 June in the form of a bizarre but beautiful glyph, resembling perhaps some kind of strange musical instrument (figure 2). Its oddness put some people off, but the fluidity of the lay inside and the complete lack of damage to the stems (in a year in which white creases on stems were widely decreed to be a sure sign of human circle-making) revealed it as a highlight of the year.

Six days later, another extraordinary design of similar quality arrived at nearby Milk Hill, this time resembling what was rather crudely termed a "bee" by some—a winged emblem atop an apparently insectoid body (figure 3). Others pointed out its closer resemblance to the ancient "winged caduceus" symbol. Its geometric properties were incredibly complex, as uncovered by geometer Allan Brown.

As the list of bold patterns in the crops began to lengthen, some formations in particular stood out. One of the longest, a vast string of circles and crescents which arrived at Windmill Hill, Avebury, Wiltshire, on 17 July, measured over 800 feet in length (figure 4). Meanwhile, a square within a circle, resembling Islamic geometric art, appeared at Savernake Forest, Marlborough, Wiltshire, on 28 July and impressed many with its optical illusion qualities (figure 5).

At West Kennett Longbarrow on 30 July, a quadranted labyrinth within an eight-pointed star began a new style for the crop circles (figure 6), while another square design of smaller squares and dots at Lewisham Castle, Aldbourne, Wiltshire, on 6 August turned out to signify "a rendition of the Magic Square representing the Moon's movements, a 9 x 9 square in which the sums of the diagonals, the rows and the columns each add to 369", according to Geoff Stray, editor of the influential website <http://www.diagnosis2012> (figure 7).

With the year 2012 in mind, the crop formation that most caught the public attention in 2004 was undoubtedly the so-called "Mayan" design which appeared over two consecutive

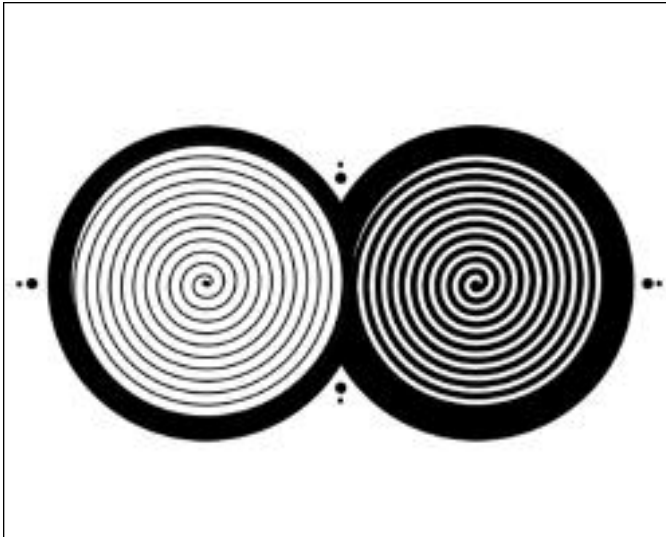


Figure 1: Fort Nelson, near Portchester, Hampshire.
Reported 11th June. Diagram: Allan Brown © 2004

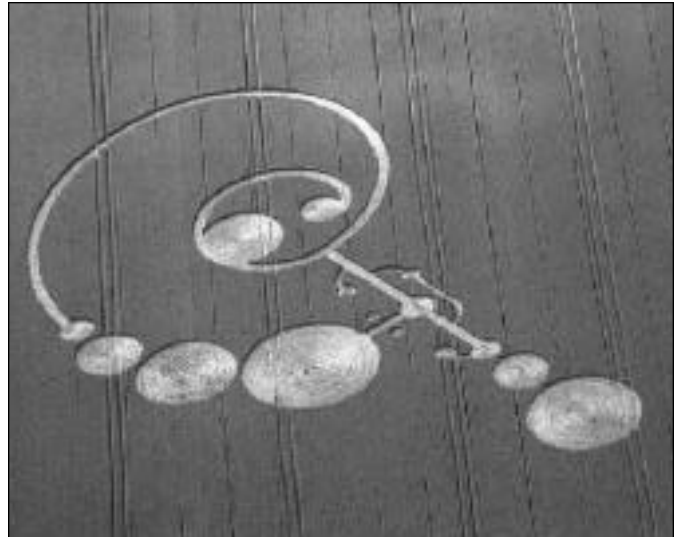


Figure 2: East Field, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire.
Reported 20th June. Photograph: Busty Taylor © 2004

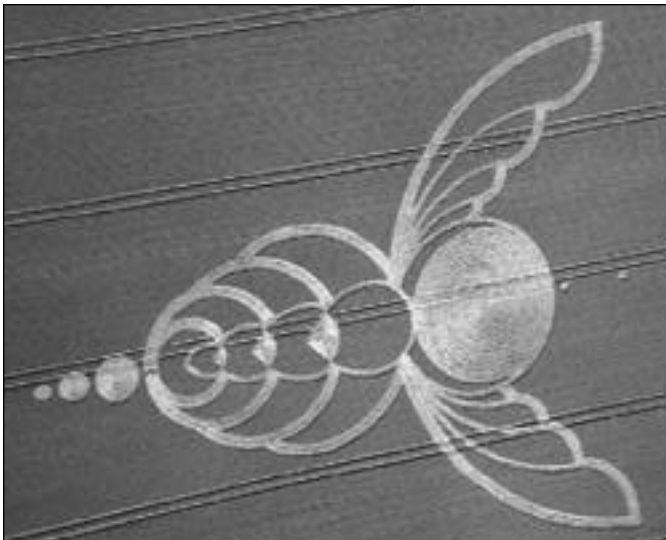


Figure 3: Milk Hill, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire
Reported 26th June. Photograph: Busty Taylor © 2004



Figure 4: Windmill Hill, near Avebury Trusloe, Wiltshire.
Reported 17th July. Photograph: Verity Bullock © 2004

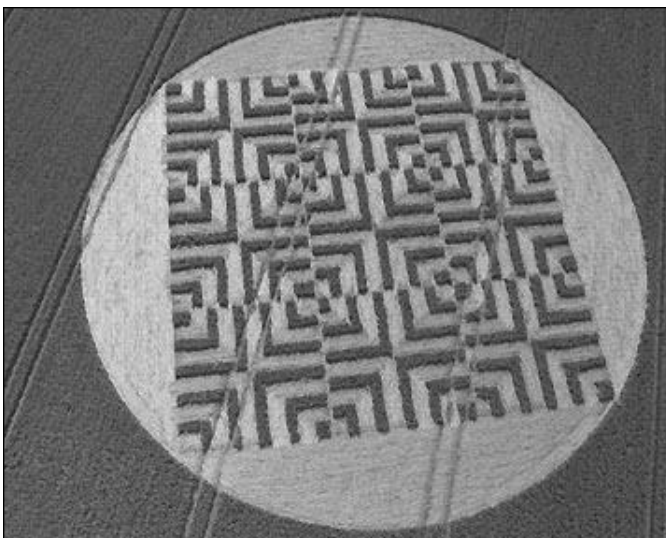


Figure 5: Savernake Forest, near Marlborough, Wiltshire.
Reported 28th July. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



Figure 6: West Kennett (2), near Silbury Hill, Wiltshire.
Reported 30th July. Photograph: Nick Nicholson © 2004

nights at Silbury Hill, Wiltshire, on 2–3 August (figure 8). (A number of formations "grew" this year, making some people suspicious.) It was a vast wheel of ancient Mayan glyphs, including "the double square spiral—the Mayan symbol for jaguar snouts, which indicates an entrance to the underworld", as described by Geoff Stray. The now widely held belief that the Mayan calendar indicates an end-of-time point in 2012 gave the UK newspapers something to get their teeth into. The *Daily Mail* dubiously proclaimed it "The Doomsday Crop Circle". Much of the speculation about this formation's 2012 connections was highly questionable, but it made good headlines—not that the press needed a genuine phenomenon to fill columns. Indeed, the *Sunday Express* went out of its way to debunk the Mayan glyph, devoting two pages to this—perhaps in an effort to "get one over" on its rival paper.

This year there was a large blast of disproportionate press publicity for human circle-makers. Several major newspapers ran large features on "plankers" (as the research community increasingly calls them), boasting of their skills in creating crop circles. As ever, what all these pieces had in common was the inevitable lack of any substance: nearly all of them involved lazy insinuation and nothing more. More seriously, there was an almost complete absence of any balancing information in these pieces beyond the odd glib quote from researchers. By and large, the plankers were presented as *the* answer to the entire crop circle mystery, with not a dissenting view on show nor any serious discussion as to the mass of contrary evidence which shows that not all glyphs can be so easily explained. Those who hold that there is a co-ordinated campaign to discredit the crop circles believe their views have been vindicated by such unbalanced publicity.

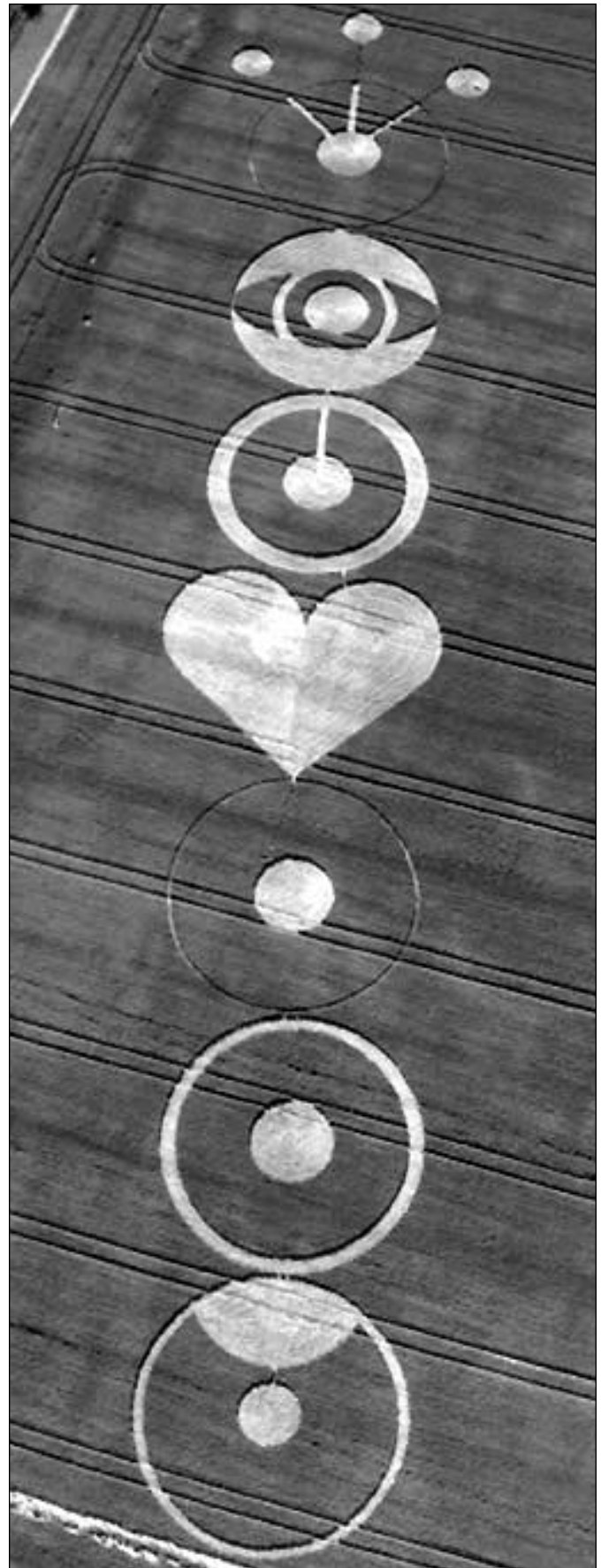
One high-profile Italian sceptic, who's been giving his country's circle researchers a hard time recently, was even spotted cavorting with known plankers in the UK this summer. It made some people wonder how wide the debunking agendas might be and who could be behind them. (However, in-fighting appeared to be breaking out amongst the ranks of the plankers themselves, with angry email tirades being openly fired off from one faction to another!)

Unfortunately, the overriding negativity which spilled over from such heightened profiles of the plankers—and not helped by the National Farmers Union, which launched a campaign this summer to discourage people from visiting crop formations—affected the mood in the croppie world, resulting in much fear and suspicion down in the fields of Wiltshire, especially with traits of human circle-making seemingly being more obvious in some formations this year. Some suggested the real phenomenon had even backed off slightly to allow the limitations of the imitators to be clearly revealed. As has been noted before, this is an interactive phenomenon, after all.

However, others considered much of this so-called negativity to be paranoia and nothing more, believing that succumbing to it only played into the hands of the debunkers. Looked at simply, within the context of other years and with the benefit of even just a few weeks of hindsight, in truth what we had was another season of some extraordinary designs, with all the accompanying wonder, beauty, confusion, trouble and strife one might expect from anything so consistently challenging and stubborn in its refusal to go away, whatever its origins.

About the Author:

Andy Thomas is a leading crop circles researcher and the world's most prolific writer on the subject. He is best known for *Vital Signs: A Complete Guide to the Crop Circle Mystery*. His most recent books are *Swirled Harvest: Views from the Crop Circle Frontline*, a collection of pieces on crop circles and related matters, and *A Oneness of Mind: The Power of Collective Thought and Signs of Our Times*, which transcribes some of Andy's extraordinary live presentations on other far-reaching matters. Information and online ordering details for all these books can be found at <http://www.vitalsignspublishing.co.uk>.



Pewsey White Horse (3), near Pewsey, Wiltshire. Reported 22nd July. Photograph: Francine Blake © 2004

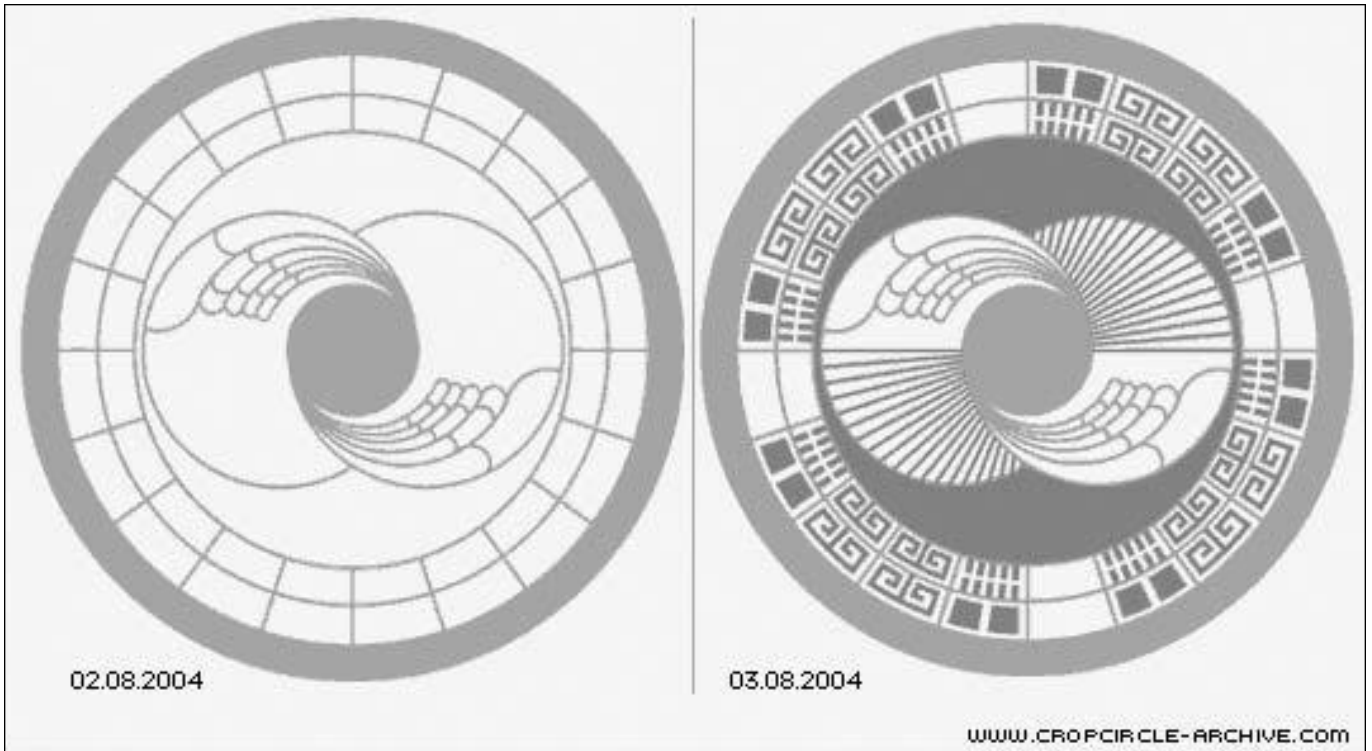


Figure 8: Silbury Hill (2), near Beckhampton, Wiltshire. Reported 2nd and 3rd August.
 Diagrams above: Berthold Zugelder © 2004. Photograph below: Steve Alexander © 2004



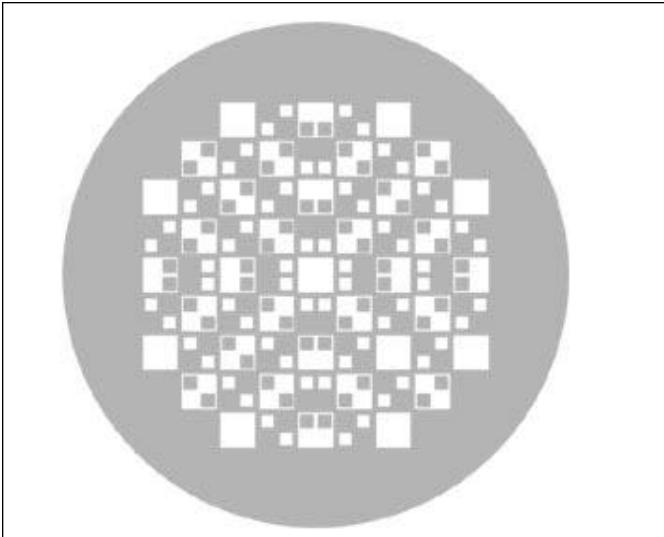
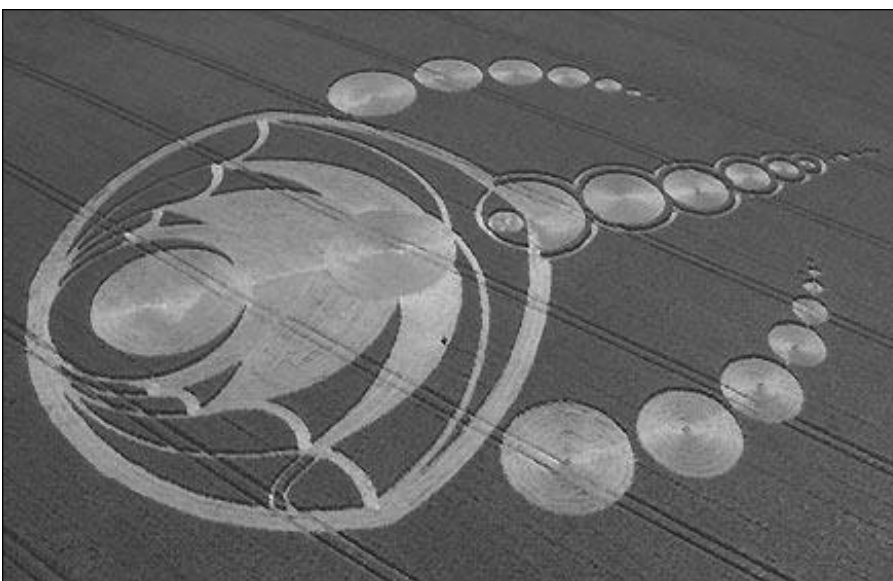
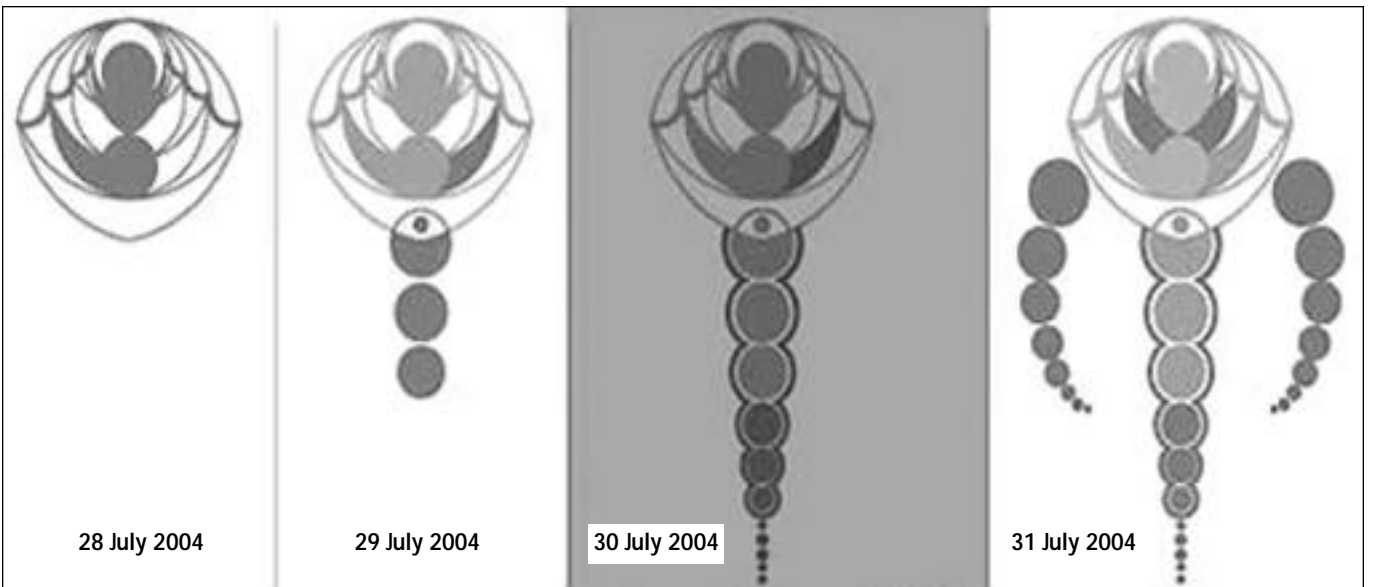


Figure 7: Lewisham Castle, Aldbourne, Wiltshire.
Reported 6th August. Diagram: Berthold Zugelder © 2004



Beacon Hill, near Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire.
Reported 28th July. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



Tan Hill (left and above), near Stanton St Bernard, Wiltshire. Reported 28th July.

This formation was created in four steps over a period of four nights (see above).

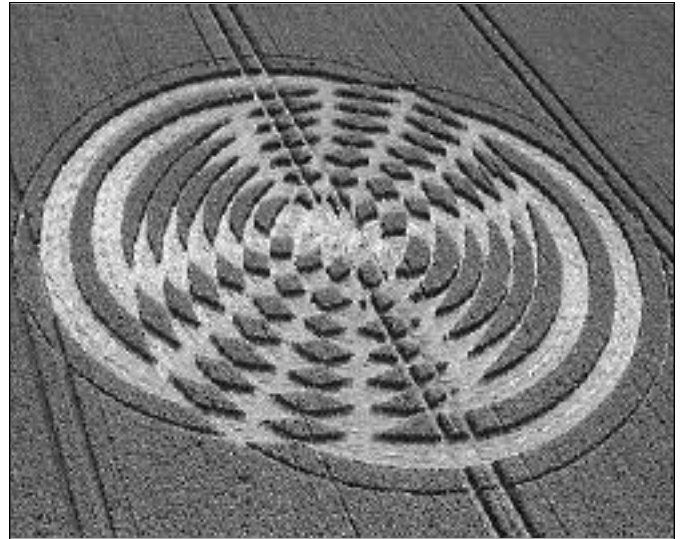
Diagrams: Berthold Zugelder © 2004
Photograph (left): Steve Alexander © 2004

Resources:

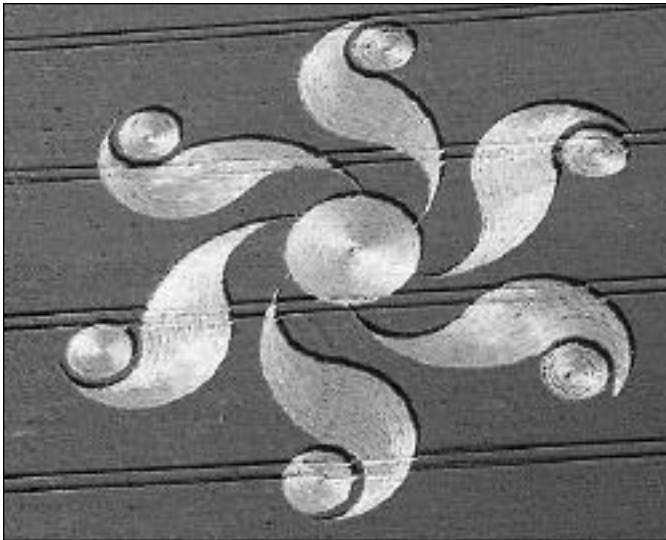
- To view all the formations for 2004, visit the website <http://www.cropcircleconnector.com>.
- More information is available from Swirled News, Southern Circular Research, 3 Old House Courtyard, Southover High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1HT, UK, websites <http://www.swirlednews.com>, <http://www.vitalsignspublishing.co.uk>.



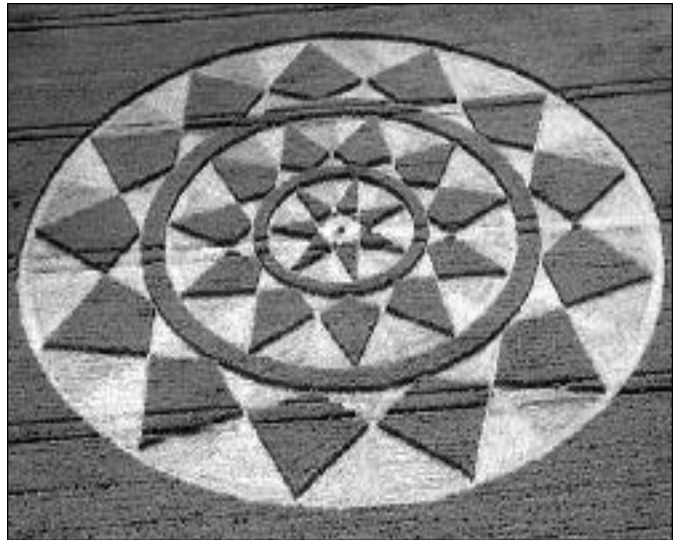
Coombe Abbey, near Coventry, Warwickshire. Reported 4th July.
Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



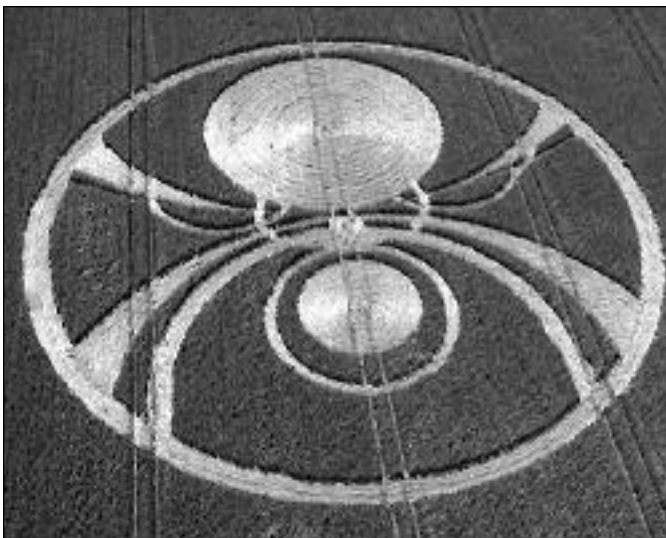
Shalbourne, near Hungerford, Wiltshire.
Reported 8th August. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



Honey Street, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire.
Reported 16th June. Photograph: John Dove © 2004



Etchilhampton Hill, near Devizes, Wiltshire.
Reported 25th July. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



Etchilhampton Hill (2), near Devizes, Wiltshire.
Reported 3rd August. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004



Blacklands Golf Course, near Calne, Wiltshire.
Reported 3rd August. Photograph: Steve Alexander © 2004